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Interagency Coordination: The Other Side of CIMIC

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ABSTRACT All governments wrestle with the challenge of interagency coordination. Improving civil-military coordination, at the national level as well as in the field, can be a useful step in designing a more effective defense decision-making process. National-level organisations do not cooperate easily, but young military and civilian personnel with CIMIC experience can begin to open stovepipes. If vertically organized governments are ever to deal effectively with horizontally organized threats, they must become populated by those who have witnessed the power of horizontal thinking. CIMIC operations thus prepare future 'bureaucrats' to create government networks capable of managing the triple threat of terrorism, insurgency and organized crime

Although CIMIC has become a term of art, it is important to remember where it comes from. 'Civil–Military Cooperation' is more than simply the basis for an operational acronym; it is the very essence of defence decision-making at the national level. There is perhaps no greater challenge for any government than to synchronise its component parts so that they function collectively like a well-oiled machine. No government facing terrorism and other transnational threats can afford to have anything less.

Interagency coordination can be understood, then, as a higher form of CIMIC; call it 'Macro CIMIC'. It is founded on the same principles as NATO CIMIC: coordination, collaboration, and complementarity. Indeed, NATO CIMIC is the operational extension of interagency coordination. It is sometimes said that terrorists flourish in the gaps between countries, those ungoverned spaces along remote borders and even within states. It would be just as accurate to say that terrorists flourish in the gaps between agencies, exploiting discontinuities and between government functions. Quite naturally, terrorists seek out these gaps between agencies and among governments trying to coordinate their strategies in collective approaches to terrorism. They find that the

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more players there are trying to thwart them, the bigger the gaps. Fighting terrorism, therefore, involves finding gaps and closing them.

There are three arenas in which governments must be able to identify and close gaps: national, regional and global. This chapter will concentrate on interagency coordination at the national level, by far the easiest of the three. CIMIC operations, however, take place in the other two. Military leadership and its CIMIC soldiers cannot expect to be successful in CIMIC operations without sustained, successful interagency coordination within their own governments. Civil–military cooperation begins at home.[1]

Coordination and Power

Government personnel consist of two distinct communities: civilian officials and military officers, each with divergent[1] characteristics and perspectives. Generalisations can be dangerous, but it may be safe to say that civilians tend to be political, process-oriented, and independent, while military personnel tend to be apolitical, action-oriented, and team-focused. Civilians usually accept change more readily and often self-organise in ad hoc groups. Military personnel generally resist change and prefer to plan deliberately, often far in advance of operations. In this traditional view, civilians are more flexible, while their military counterparts are more decisive. However, the traditional view has been overtaken by events. Terrorism and other transnational threats have forced civilians to think more like military personnel (in fact, some of them have more combat experience than many serving officers). Military personnel, especially those engaged in CIMIC operations, must now include civilian skills in their repertoire, an evolution best described by the term 'three-block war'.[2] Distinctions between the two communities are blurring rapidly, as a result of increased interaction with one another in the field. We have come to the point where the term 'warrior-diplomat' is no longer an oxymoron.[3]

Unfortunately, institutions are far less flexible than individuals. Institutions do, however, encourage their personnel to develop characteristics that promote the survival of the organisation above all else. The result is a hardening process whereby institutions acquire 'personalities' that no longer respond to outside pressures. It is such institutions that must participate in the interagency decision-making process. While the pressure of field operations induces civilians and their military counterparts to cooperate, no parallel mechanism induces cooperation at the governmental level. Indeed, the survival of an agency is often believed to derive from its *isolation* from other agencies. It is relatively easy to create a 'culture of cooperation' where individuals are dependent upon each other for security, vital resources, and mission

success. Unfortunately, habits of cooperation are hard to develop when institutions must deal with one another in what Graham Allison calls 'bureaucratic politics'.[4]

The civil–military interface within governments thus sees organisations coming into conflict more often than working together. Conflict is an inherent feature of interagency decision-making. Agencies are forced to compete for limited resources in pursuit of their own institutional interests, the most important of which is getting the credit (and, as a result, more resources) for successful government decisions and programmes. Conflict is not, however, all bad. Managed conflict is the essence of democracy because it provides decision-makers with more ideas to choose from.[5] Governments that have learned to harness the power of competition can make interagency coordination work *for* them. Alas, experience shows destructive competition occurs more often than constructive cooperation.

Agencies disagree over many aspects of decision-making. First, they disagree over what the real problem is. Second, they disagree on what the response should be. Even when agencies agree to pursue coordinated strategies, they often use different measures to evaluate whether those strategies are leading them to the results they want.[6] Agencies almost always have overlapping responsibilities (certainly better than gaps), but they often can use the overlaps to increase their power and influence at the expense of a rival agency. No agency likes to admit that another can do something better than *it* can. Additionally, there are many examples of one agency having the authority and another having the resources needed to carry out an operation. This problem occurs more frequently with civilian agencies than it does with the military.

The word 'bureaucracy' has taken on a negative connotation in most societies (largely due to the dynamics discussed above), but as a valuable structure for complex decision-making, bureaucracy is a necessary evil whose ill effects can only be mitigated.[7] That mitigation is particularly important inside a government fighting terrorists organised in networks. All governments start with the disadvantage of bureaucracy, vertically organised hierarchies, facing horizontally organised threats. Mitigation of bureaucracy's ill effect centres on coordination and collective action, on achieving the 'unity of effort', not necessarily produced by the long-cherished military principle 'unity of command'. For thousands of years governments have evolved toward more *centralised* decision-making. Only aggressive interagency coordination can enable bureaucracies to mobilise resources quickly enough to defeat their decentralised terrorist adversaries.[8]

The currency of government is power, who has it, and how it is used. Constitutions limit the overall power of government relative to its citizens, and laws regulate the short-term flow of power back and forth

between them. The process of interagency decision making regulates how power is distributed within government among individuals and institutions. Power is an asset that agency directors use to strengthen the positions of their organisations relative to 'the competition' (i.e., other agencies). Power is but one leg of a tripod, however, with responsibility and authority as the other two vertices. Without powerful people in charge, agencies can possess all the responsibility and authority they require, but they will not do very well in the interagency decision-making process. This presents a dilemma, however, since powerful people have a gravitational effect on responsibility and authority, pulling all decision-making into their own offices. This tendency results in the very opposite of what governments want or need.[9]

Incentives to Coordinate

At the most basic level, government functions through system of incentives and disincentives to encourage behaviour it wants (say, loyalty), and to discourage behaviour it does not want (say, terrorism). Fighting terrorism *demands* coordination because the problems it presents are all multi-dimensional and interdependent, crossing jurisdictional lines. This challenge requires different actors with different expertise, all working together. Governments need to ensure that all actors collaborate efficiently as well as effectively, creating redundancy where it is needed (in very important capabilities), while avoiding gaps elsewhere. How can governments encourage coordination among their various components?

Decision-makers can create interagency 'task forces', giving them responsibility for recommending courses of action. Task forces expand the menu of ideas available to the decision-maker, while diluting narrow institutional thinking. It is also easier to share credit within a multi-agency effort. Single institutions tend to have their own 'cultures' and standard approaches to problems, which can result in the lethal condition sometimes referred to as 'group-think'.[10] Teamwork can be inculcated through training and education, cross-fertilising ideas among agencies, one individual at a time. Mutual education leads to mutual understanding, and that produces the mutual respect required for trust. Only when individuals from different agencies trust each other can they extract beneficial results from their coordination. Relationships are more important than events. It is the relationships that must be nourished.

The teamwork ethic is not difficult to instil in subordinates. The sports world provides a long string of examples to illustrate the value of leadership that can encourage such cooperation Indeed, certain coaches and managers get consistently better results than others. Government leadership is not very different. Decision-makers must appeal to the

human ability to cooperate, providing simple guidance and the structure needed to enable it.[11] Interagency players must be conditioned to debate on the basis of real interests rather than previously staked-out agency positions. Teamwork can *only* result from reconciling these interests.[12] This dynamic was best explained in 1759 by Adam Smith, who described society itself as a team of specialists in which the success of one member benefits.[13] The best contemporary demonstration of this principle is found in the game theory experiment, 'Prisoner's Dilemma'. The game presents two prisoners, questioned separately, with each given the option of 'ratting' on the other in exchange for a light sentence. After one or two iterations, researchers found that by coordinating their answers, the prisoners got the best outcome for both of them.[14] Communication among individuals and the agencies they represent is the key to obtaining the best outcome for each agency participating in a collective decision.

Successfully inducing subordinates to coordinate their actions (within a general atmosphere of cooperation) requires leaders to appeal to their sense of the 'greater good' (something abstract like 'the triumph of freedom' or something more concrete like 'survival of the state'). Only thinking beyond one's own organisation can produce individual behaviours that reinforce interagency goals. This focus on the greater good requires the subordination of the self, not just to an organisation, but to a *cause*.[15]

Networks Against Networks

It takes networks to defeat networks.[16] Networks have become, for many purposes, a more sophisticated form of organisation than traditional hierarchies. For one thing, they use information more effectively, and information is the fuel that powers a modern organisation. Networked decision-making cycles, if they exist at all, tend to be shorter and less cumbersome. Part of the reason for this efficiency is found in the phenomenon of self-organised behaviour, both a cause and an effect of network design.[17] In addition to being more productive, individuals working in such an environment tend to be more creative, with many more ideas finding their way to execution. The evolution from hierarchies to networks has taken place across a wide spectrum of organised effort, including terrorist groups.[18] That recognition has prompted governments to investigate the dynamics of networked decision-making and how it can be applied to the problem of terrorism. The challenge for governments is to 'flatten' their decision-making processes to develop the speed and agility necessary to get inside the decision cycles of their terrorist adversaries.

Unfortunately, governments are not well equipped for networked decision-making. They have 'solved' the complexity problem by evolving large bureaucracies that centralise decision-making and reward 'stove-piping' (staying within vertical chains of command that discourage the horizontal sharing of information at all levels). Governments thus illustrate the inflexibility that occurs when order is imposed from above, what the ancient Greeks called '*taxis*'. Terrorist networks, on the other hand, illustrate what the Greeks called '*kosmos*', a spontaneous order, maintained through the interaction of many individuals, coordinating their actions while conforming to a very simple set of rules. Imposed order sacrifices performance for control, while spontaneous order sacrifices control for performance.[19]

Governments require enough control to guarantee accountability; terrorists can avoid accountability altogether. Using information technology, and borrowing business practices from the private sector, governments have started to mix traditional hierarchies with decentralised structures and processes.[20] Terrorism disturbs the balance of this mix by forcing governments back to the 'taxis' side of the balance. Terrorism is not about the actions terrorists take; it is about the *reactions* they force governments to make. Instead of decentralising to tap the creative potential of spontaneous order, they often centralise decision-making in the name of security.

The price of centralisation is loss of flexibility and speed. However, that is a price governments threatened by terrorism, are increasingly unwilling to pay, especially when they see other governments fail to combat terrorism. They *want* to decentralise, but decentralisation requires coordination, and the more terrorism threatens, the more coordination is required. The challenge of coordination can be met successfully only by thinking in terms of networks, not just at the top of agencies but all the way down to the field. Network thinking should come easier to governments than it does; virtually all the critical infrastructure they are attempting to protect from terrorists is arranged in the form of networks.[21]

Complex networks, both infrastructure and terrorist, exhibit multiple critical nodes, or 'hubs' with large number of connections relative to other parts of the network. As a network grows, emerging hubs become essential to the smooth flow of information and material resources within the network. The most common result of this development is what Hungarian physicist Alberto-Lazlo Barabasi calls a 'scale-free' network, resistant to accidental failures, but quite vulnerable to targeted attacks.[22] Governments wishing to attack terrorist organisations have to recognize them as social and commercial networks with *individuals* as hubs.[23] The targeting of individuals, linked by family, religious and financial ties, is an effort requiring the highest degree of coordination among government officials at all levels (particularly intelligence

professionals). Indeed, it requires a social network of individuals *within* government who know each other well and who coordinate their actions in an atmosphere of teamwork and trust.[24]

Keeping it Together

Even when a government succeeds in taking a networked approach to fighting terrorism (and such a success can only be partial), the challenge of keeping the network together presents itself. Complex systems form spontaneous networks, which left alone, function rather well. Government networks are a product of human imagination that do not hold up very well under the weight of human frailty. Individuals seeking power – and agencies seeking credit – will quickly erode the intra-governmental harmony needed for long-term effectiveness. Reality, like gravity, operates with relentless enthusiasm. Without something more concrete than imagination to hold them together, networks revert to hierarchical organisations. In a process of bureaucratic plate tectonics, agencies tend to pull away from each other, gathering momentum as they go.

This tendency can, however, be overcome. Leadership stitches networks together in the first place, and strong leadership (the kind that enables and empowers subordinates) is the most important factor in keeping them together. But leadership can only set the conditions for success. Paradoxically, leaders who drive their own agencies to success can often drive a network, of which that agency is a part, to failure. There must be a powerful incentive actually to glue pieces of the network to each other, something to provide the head of each agency with the information and material resources of all other agencies. Governments can learn to unlock the power of liaison.

Liaison is underestimated by most leaders, perhaps because they inherited from their mentors the bad habit of assigning their most expendable people, those with limited capabilities, to liaison positions. Good (even brilliant) liaison officers can be the glue that holds agencies together enough to enable them to operate as networks. Liaison develops the 'weak ties' needed to counter the strong ties that bind personnel from within the same agency into like-minded groups3.[25] The effect can only be achieved, however, if leaders break out of the traditional mold and send their best people to represent them elsewhere.[26]

Liaison, taken seriously, gets information and material resources where they need to go in time for crisis action. When decision-makers convene meetings, they must have the best information in order to make the best decisions. That means information, not only about their own agencies, but also about every other agency with a stake in the decision. This comprehensive information is critical both at the planning level and

in the field. Indeed, the assurance that information and material resources are getting to the right place within a network is exactly what CIMIC operations are all about. What governments and their field personnel seek is a 'network of networks' that protects the sovereignty of individual agencies, but also serves to extend them into one another.

As information flows through a complex network it takes the path of least resistance. That path is populated by 'super-connected' individuals who can make things happen quickly. Those people live at the hubs of the network. At the field level those individuals are often CIMIC soldiers; at the planning level they are often senior military officers with CIMIC experience. CIMIC thus acts as a 'leader nursery', preparing junior military officers for networked, interagency decision-making at the national level. Such operations also prepare young civilians from government and non-governmental organisations to assume positions of leadership in future governments confronting terrorism. As the two communities grow up together in a world of transnational threats and complex contingencies, they will be drawn together as never before. Thanks to habits of cooperation honed in the crucible of truth learned on the ground, they will be able to think in terms of networks, making the timely and reliable interagency decisions their governments require for success.

NOTES

1. Interagency decision-making requires more than just cooperation. I have chosen to use the word 'coordination' to describe the actions of agencies working together, while retaining the word 'cooperation' in references to CIMIC operations.
2. This term was originally used by General Charles Krulak, Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999. It is used to illustrate the challenge of an infantryman who must be prepared for combat in one location, humanitarian assistance in another, and peacekeeping in yet another. Also for Krulak, *Cultivating Intuitive Decisionmaking*, Marine Corps Gazette, May, 1999 a thorough description of the concept, see General Krulak's *News Hour* Interview with Jim Lehrer of 25 June, 1999 .
3. Many recent articles have emphasised the need for foreign service and military officers to learn more about each other so they can optimise their increasingly regular collaborations. See Jon Gunderson, 'Soldiers and Diplomats: They Have to Work Together – Can They?', *Foreign Service Journal* (Sept., 1998) pp.34–43.
4. See Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision*, New York: Little, Brown, and Co, 1971 for analysis of decision-making during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.
5. Robert Dah, *On Democracy*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998, p.85. The book as a whole is worth reading for its insights on this issue.
6. The US Drug Enforcement Administration, for example, uses the weight of seized cocaine as a 'measure of effectiveness', while the Department of Defense, in an effort to develop interdiction capabilities in Latin American forces, measures its success in just the opposite way (if nothing is seized, the drug traffickers have been deterred from using a particular method of transportation).
7. The need for bureaucracy to facilitate complex decision-making was best described by the German sociologist Max Weber, most notably in his essay 'Politics as a Vocation'.
8. There is a balance between centralisation and decentralisation to contend with. Too much centralisation yields a government with only one decision-maker, whose decisions are only as

good as his own understanding of the situation. (Nepal is the best example of this at the moment.) At the other end of the continuum is a government so decentralised that those responsible do not know (or can choose to ignore) what is going on at the field level. (Argentina's 'Dirty War' of the 1970s is a case in point.)

9. A comparison between US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his predecessor, William Cohen illustrates this point. Cohen had the same responsibilities and authorities – and certainly an equivalent intellect – but he did not have the bureaucratic skill and personal aggressiveness of Rumsfeld.
10. By many accounts, this is what happened to the CIA in advance of the US invasion of Iraq. The assertion that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction was almost genetically embedded in the organisation. Officials from outside an organisation are not normally infected by the group-think virus (and can inoculate the group against it).
11. One theory of human evolution explains the development of man's intelligence as an outgrowth of having to forage in groups, cooperating to find food and security. See 'Survey of Human Evolution', *The Economist* (24 December, 2005).
12. The principles of effective negotiation can most easily be reviewed in the brief, but very useful, Roger Fisher and William Ury of the Harvard Negotiating Project, *Getting to Yes*, New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
13. See Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953 pp.42–43 for a concise description of Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.
14. This is an example of a 'Nash Equilibrium'. For a relatively simple explanation of this and other non-cooperative games see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nash_Equlibrium>.
15. Ironically, terrorists use this technique to recruit operatives (particularly suicide bombers), inducing them to commit acts of violence against innocents. The 'greater good' justification for terrorism is long-standing.
16. This is the central premise guiding much of John Arquilla's work, the most useful of which is *Countering the New Terrorism*, written with Lesser, *et al.*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA; 1999.
17. Self-organised systems are all around us, from the flocking behaviour of birds, to the relative order inherent in most societies, to the universe itself. For a very readable treatise on self-organised behaviour, see Mitchell Resnick, *Turtles, Termites, and Traffic Jams*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997.
18. In the 1970s and 1980s terrorist organisations mimicked the hierarchies of government and organised crime. That is one reason they were so easy to defeat relative to today's networked terrorist organisations.
19. For an excellent discussion of imposed and spontaneous order see Friedrich A. Hayek, 'Cosmos and Taxis' in *Theories of Social Order*, edited by Michael Hechter and Christine Horne, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
20. The US Coast Guard is one such organisation. Much authority has been delegated to local commanders to react independently to a fluid situation. See also Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, Saint Paul, MN: Zenith Press, Minnesota pp.273–91. In this final chapter, Hammes describes the highly networked USMC 'Chemical, Biological Response Force'.
21. Critical infrastructure is a series of 'sectors', each exhibiting a network structure. Some examples are transportation, water supply, public health, telecommunications and energy.
22. For a full discussion of scale-free networks, see Albert-Lazlo Barabasi, *Linked*, New York: Penguin Group; New York, 2003.
23. Individual terrorists, just like government officials, display differing degrees of personal power. If they are not careful, charismatic and capable terrorists can make themselves too critical to the network's operations. The network could even evolve into a single hub and spoke structure, becoming far easier for the government to disrupt than a network.
24. The social networks operating within government are dependent upon individuals with a large number of links to others. These 'super-connected' individuals do not *do* everything, but they are the key to making things happen. The same dynamic operates at the field level, where CIMIC soldiers become the critical nodes who make things happen.
25. See Mark S. Granovetter 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6) (1973) pp.1360–80.
26. Perhaps the ultimate expression of good liaison was the dispatch of T.E. Lawrence as British liaison officer to the Arabs in 1916.